


Wikimedia Australia's partnership with Alice Springs Public Library



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At the end of 2023, Wikimedia Australia partnered with the Alice Springs Public Library, located in the heart of Mparntwe, to add a selection of images from the Central Australian Historical Images Collection to Wikimedia Commons. Wikimedia Commons is a free media file repository where individuals and institutions, including those from the galleries, libraries, archives, museums (GLAM) sector, can make files available. These files are either in the public domain or under a variety of Creative Commons licences. Wikimedia Commons uses the same technology as Wikipedia so that everyone can edit. Uploading files to Wikimedia Commons means that they will show up in web search results like Google Image, and many institutions have found this has increased web traffic to their websites and collections. The Alice Springs Public Library is not the first GLAM institution in Australia to add images to commons, with the State Library of NSW having added over 2,000 images and the State Library of Queensland 50,000.

The Central Australian Images Collection at the Alice Springs Public Library, which consists of about 3,000 images (made up of 29 smaller collections) has been written about previously in a 2019 issue of *INCITE*, when an assessment of the cultural

sensitivity of the images took place with Braydon Kanjira, a Traditional Owner and Arrernte Senior Ceremonial Leader, from Ntaria (Hermannsburg). As part of this assessment, images were graded on a 'traffic-light' system — green for unrestricted access, orange for warned access and red for restricted access. Only a small number of images were flagged as orange or red; however, it was an important assessment to undertake with any sort of publication of these images to ensure cultural sensitivity. All images that were flagged in any way have not been included in the partner project with Wikimedia Australia and, in this partnership, we have referred regularly to the Guidelines for First Nations Collection Development by Tui Raven, which were released as this project started.

One of the intentions of these guidelines — along with assisting libraries to adopt reparative and anti-racist description practices and premises in understanding Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property — is to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials more discoverable. The goal of increased discoverability was a foremost concern of Geoff Purdie and Barry Allwright, the two local historians who were responsible for collecting the majority of images that make up the Central Australian Historical Images Collection, although discoverability can be understood in a more general sense in this context. They wanted to preserve as much Central Australian photographic history as possible due to a concern that long-term



Aboriginal boys
outside a shop on the
corner of Gregory
Terrace and Todd
Street, Alice Springs,
1957–1958.

*Image from the Anton
Faymann Collection,
Central Australian
Historical Images, via
Wikimedia Commons*

residents often leave Alice Springs, taking their photographs with them, and when residents die, their photos are often destroyed or dispersed to family throughout Australia. Geoff and Barry wanted the images to be available to the general public, especially writers and historians.

It is not an overstatement to say that the project between Wikimedia Australia and Alice Springs Public Library has gone a long way to increasing discoverability as, previous to this partnership, none of these images were available online and were only available on select computers within the library building. Additionally, this project has prompted discussions between Alice Springs Public Library and Libraries & Archives NT about the possibility of making these

images available through Territory Stories, a database of digital and published collections about the Northern Territory. If this further partnership is successful, it would also mean that the images will be harvestable through the National Library's Trove database.

Two collections were initially selected for upload to Wikimedia Commons as part of the partnership: the Donald and Isabel Dowling Collection and the Anton Faymann Collection. These are vastly different collections and they were chosen, in part, for the following reasons.

- The Donald and Isabel Dowling Collection is a collection of 241 black-and-white images that capture the transformative impact of World War II in Mparntwe and other areas of Central Australia. The photographs were



Workers on the Stuart Highway, south of Alice Springs, 1957–1958. Image originally from the Northern Territory Public Works Department.

Image from the Anton Faymann Collection, Central Australian Historical Images, via Wikimedia Commons

taken between 1938 and 1948 and show the military build-up during that period, including army encampments in Alice Springs.

These images were added to 28 Wikipedia articles and, for many of the pages, they were the first Creative Commons images available and added significant historic value. The Wikipedia page, 'Her Majesty's Gaol and Labour Prison, Alice Springs', was also created to host a number of these images.

- The Anton Faymann Collection is a collection of 81 colour images that were taken by an Austrian traveller between 1957 and 1958 while he was working as a truck driver and chainman to improve the Stuart Highway.

These images present a really joyful picture of Mparntwe and show Anton's interest and affection for the people and places of the town. In many ways these were harder to slot directly into Wikipedia pages, but 17 of them have been linked and used to add significant value to Wikipedia pages — in particular, the images of Pitchi Richi Sanctuary and Friedrich Wilhelm Albrecht (who was a Lutheran missionary).

The total number of images that have been uploaded so far is 322 and we used an open-source platform called Pattypan to make bulk uploads.

In the first six months of being uploaded, between December 2023 and May 2024, the

Army camp in Alice Springs during World War II. Photo taken from the top of ANZAC Hill (Untyeyetwelye/ Atnelkentyarliweke), 1938–1948. Image from the Donald and Isabel Dowling Collection, Central Australian Historical Images, via Wikimedia Commons

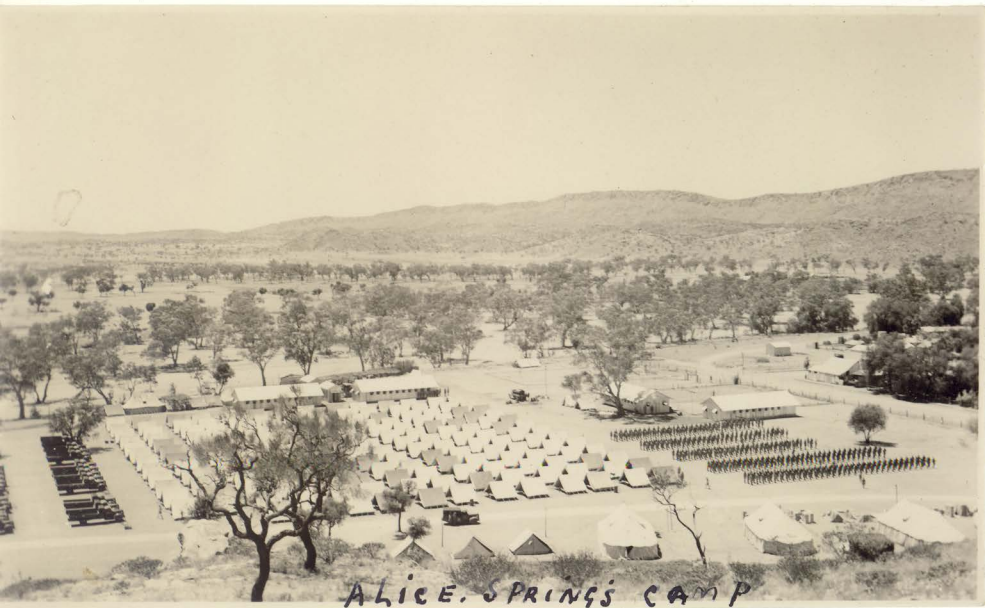


Table 1: Statistics for the first six months of 322 uploaded images

Month	Views	Wikipedia pages using
December 2023	51,010	25
January 2024	70,524	28
February 2024	59,524	28
March 2024	85,102	29
April 2024	63,060	49
May 2024	55,440	49

images were viewed almost 400,000 times on Wikipedia alone, with an average of 60,000 views a month.

The full statistics are available in Table 1.

This is an amazing result for both Wikimedia Australia and the Alice Springs Public Library and, based on this success, we will continue working together to make more of these images available.

If you have photos in your collection you'd like to share, you can go to Wikimedia Commons, sign up for an account and start uploading today. However, if you have a large collection you want to upload all at once, then get in contact with Wikimedia Australia and we'll help you! ●



March of Army personnel on Todd Street, Alice Springs, This is now the Todd Mall, 1938–1948. Image from the Donald and Isabel Dowling Collection, Central Australian Historical Images, via Wikimedia Commons